

Message Text

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UNCLAS SECTION 1 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 2206

PASS AGRICULTURE

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SUBJ: PROSPECTS FOR PAKISTAN WHEAT CROP

1. SUMMARY. PUNJAB PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS ESTIMATE WHEAT CROP WILL BE 5.2 MILLION TONS AS COMPARED WITH 5.6 MILLION TONS LAST YEAR. HOWEVER., NUMEROUS PUNJAB FARMERS BELIEVE PUNJAB CROP WILL AT LEAST REACH LEVEL OF PREVIOUS YEAR DUE TO COMBINATION OF FACTORS. SIND PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS ESTIMATE 900,000 TON WHEAT CROP AS COMPARED WITH 1.2 MILLION TON THE PREVIOUS YEAR. UNLIKELY THAT ESTIMATE WILL CHANGE SIGNIFICANTLY DUE SHORT TIME BEFORE HARVEST BEGINS IN SIND. NWFP WHEAT CROP OFFICIALLY ESTIMATED TO EQUAL LAST YEAR'S 600,000 TONS BUT FAVORABLE WEATHER COULD RESULT IN LARGER CROP. SMALL BALUCHISTAN CROP SHOULD APPROXIMATE LAST YEAR'S 100,000 TONS. THUS, PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS' ESTIMATES OF PAKISTAN'S WHEAT CROP TOTAL 6.8 MILLION TONS AS COMPARED WITH LAST YEAR'S OFFICIAL ESTIMATE OF 7.5 MILLION TONS. HOWEVER, UNOFFICIAL ESTIMATES RANGE UP TO 7.3 MILLION TONS. OVERALL, PROSPECTS FOR WHEAT CROP HAVE IMPROVED SIGNIFICANTLY DUE GENERALLY FAVORABLE WEATHER CONDITIONS SINCE JANUARY AND BECAUSE OF NO UNUSUAL PEST OR DISEASE PROBLEMS. FARMERS CAUTION, THOUGH, THAT FINAL HARVEST STILL SUBJECT TO WHIMS OF NATURE. END SUMMARY.

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2. AT EMBASSY'S REQUEST, KARACHI, LAHORE AND PESHAWAR CONSULATES HAVE PREPARED ESTIMATES OF CURRENT WHEAT CROP IN THEIR RESPECTIVE PROVINCES.

3. CONGEN LAHORE REPORTS THAT PRELIMINARY ESTIMATES BY PUNJAB AGRICULTURE DEPT INDICATE THAT 10.5 MILLION ACRES ARE UNDER WHEAT CULTIVATION IN PROVINCE THIS YEAR. THIS COMPARED WITH 10.9 MILLION ACRES IN 1973/74. THEIR FIGURES SHOW ACTUAL PRODUCTION LAST YEAR AS 5.6 MILLION TONS AND ESTIMATE THAT 5.2 MILLION TONS WILL BE PRODUCED IN THE PUNJAB THIS YEAR.

4. AGRICULTURE OFFICIALS BLAME INSUFFICIENT IRRIGATION WATER AS PRIMARY REASON FOR THEIR LOWERED ESTIMATES AND NOTE THAT WOULD ALSO MEAN LESS USAGE OF FERTILIZER. THEY AND IRRIGATION DEPT OFFICIALS SAY THAT ONLY FIFTY PERCENT OF REQUIRED IRRIGATION WATER FOR WHEAT WAS AVAILABLE FOR PERIOD OCTOBER-JANUARY AS COMPARED TO EIGHTY PERCENT AVAILABILITY LAST YEAR. (AT PRESENT TIME OFFICIALS SAY THEY ARE PROVIDING EIGHTY TO EIGHTY-FIVE PERCENT OF CURRENT NEEDS DURING MATURING PERIOD. THEY BELIEVE THIS WILL BE SUFFICIENT TO ASSURE HEALTHY SURVIVAL OF PRESENT STANDING CROP.)

5. OTHER SOURCES, INCLUDING NUMEROUS WHEAT FARMERS, BOTH LARGE AND SMALL, HAVE GIVEN LAHORE CONGEN SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT PICTURE. VIRTUALLY ALL FARMERS SAY THEY PLANTED SLIGHTLY LESS ACREAGE THIS YEAR AS COMPARED TO LAST. HOWEVER, THEY ALMOST ALL SAY THAT THERE IS GOOD POSSIBILITY THAT ACTUAL PRODUCTION THIS YEAR WILL BE SLIGHTLY HIGHER THAN THAT OF LAST YEAR. IN ARRIVING AT THIS SEEMINGLY CONTRADICTORY CONCLUSION, THEY POINTED OUT THAT THEY WERE FOREWARNED OF LACK OF AVAILABILITY OF IRRIGATION WATER AND SAID MANY OF THEM, ESPECIALLY LARGE FARMERS, PURCHASED EXTRA MOTORS TO RUN TUBEWELLS. SECONDLY, THEY PRACTICED FAR MORE STRINGENT WATER CONSERVATION THIS YEAR. THIRDLY, WIDESPREAD AND AMPLE RAINFALL IN DECEMBER, JANUARY AND EARLY FEBRUARY PROVIDED BOOST, WHICH THEY ENCOURAGED BY ADDITION OF MORE FERTILIZER. FOURTHLY, THERE HAVE BEEN NO UNUSUAL PROBLEMS WITH PESTS OR DISEASES. FINALLY, MANY FARMERS USED BETTER QUALITY SEED THIS YEAR. HOWEVER, ALL FARMERS WARNED THAT UNCLASSIFIED

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CROPS ARE SUBJECT TO WHIMS OF NATURE AND THAT BAD WEATHER NOW COULD TURN THEIR HOPES AROUND.

6. ON SUBJECT OF WATER, IRRIGATION DEPT OFFICIALS NOTE THAT PUNJAB HAS ESSENTIALLY THREE SOURCES OF IRRIGATION WATER. SOUTHERN PUNJAB CANALS ARE FED BY INDUS RIVER VIA PANJNAD HEADWORKS AND AREA BENEFITED GREATLY FROM EXTRA-ORDINARY RELEASE OF WATER FROM TARBALA, AS WELL AS FROM

DECEMBER AND JANUARY RAINS. HORTHERN PUNJAB CANALS ARE FED BY CHENAB AND JHELUM RIVERS. NORMALLY REQUIREMENT FOR IRRIGATION WATER FOR RABI CROP IS 41,000 CUSECS (45,000 CUSECS IF WATER LOSSES ARE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT). AT PRESENT, DISCHARGE FROM MANGLA IS RUNNING 17-21,000 CUSECS DAILY AND ON MARCH 11 WAS 20,000 CUSECS. HOWEVER, CHENAB, WHICH NORMALLY PROVIDES 18,000 CUSECS AT THIS TIME OF THE YEAR, IS CURRENTLY RUNNING AT ABOUT 13,000 CUSECS. THIS IS PRIMARY CAUSE OF REDUCTION IN AVAILABLE CANAL WATER.

7. AS OF MARCH 9, MANGLA RESERVOIR HELD .45 MILLION ACRE FEET (MAF) OF WATER (TOTAL LIVE STORAGE CAPACITY IS 5.34 MAF). IN 1973, MANGLA HELD 1.5 MILLION MAF ON THAT DATE: BUT IT IS MISLEADING TO COMPARE FIGURES FOR DIFFERENT YEARS AND DRAW GENERAL CONCLUSIONS BECAUSE WHAT IS MORE IMPORTANT IS WHETHER INFLOW EXCEEDS OUTFLOW THROUGH DAM. AT PRESENT TIME INFLOW EXCEEDS OUTFLOW BY 19,000 CUSECS, WHICH LEADS ALL OFFICIALS TO BELIEVE THERE WILL BE AMPLE WATER TO TAKE WHEAT CROP TO MATURITY. HOWEVER, THEY ARE NOT WILLING TO PREDICT WHETHER THERE WILL BE SUFFICIENT WATER FOR SPRING PLANTING (RICE AND SUGAR CANE).

8. BOTH WAPDA AND IRRIGATION DEPT HAVE CAREFULLY ALLOCATED MUCH OF AVAILABLE POWER FROM MANGLA AND OTHER GENERATORS

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TO SCARPS AND OTHER TUBEWELL GRIDS THAT CAN BE ISOLATED. AS FAR AS IS KNOWN TO CONGEN LAHORE, TUBEWELLS WERE ONLY SHUT DOWN FOR FOUR HOURS EACH DAY (DURING PEAK DEMAND HOURS) DURING POWER CRISIS. SHORTFALL AT OTHER TIMES WAS MET BY "LOAD SHEDDING" IN INDUSTRIAL AND COMMERCIAL SECTORS. THUS, CONGEN LAHORE AND LOCAL OFFICIALS BELIEVE RECENT TUBEWELL OUTPUT WAS NOT SIGNIFICANTLY LESS THAN LAST YEAR.

9. WINTER RAINS IN PUNJAB HAVE BEEN ESPECIALLY BENEFICIAL TO WHEAT CROP. IN PAST TEN DAYS, MORE WIDESPREAD LIGHT RAINS (.25 TO .75 INCH) IN NORTHERN PUNJAB, NWFP AND KASHMIR HAVE PROVIDED ADDITIONAL FILIP, ESPECIALLY IN BARANI AREAS. RAINS HAVE ALSO MADE SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN POND LEVEL AT MANGLA.

10. CONGEN KARACHI REPORTS THAT GREATER THAN NORMAL RAINFALL WHICH OCCURED OVER SOME AGRICULTURAL AREAS OF SIND IN JANUARY AND FEBRUARY DID IMPROVE PROSPECTS FOR WHEAT HARVEST AND FOR OTHER CROPS AS WELL. THESE RAINS COUNTERED SOMEWHAT THE ADVERSE EFFECTS OF SHORTAGE OF IRRIGATION WATER WHICH REPORTEDLY WAS 25 PERCENT LOWER THAN NORMAL THIS YEAR.

1. DURING MEETING MARCH 6, SPECIAL AGRICULTURAL ADVISOR UNCLASSIFIED

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TO THE CHIEF MINISTER, K.K. LAL SHAHANI, INFORMED CONGENOFF THAT LATEST HARD ESTIMATE FOR SIND WHEAT CROP, WHICH HAD BEEN DEVELOPED AS A RESULT OF LENGTHY MEETING SIND AGRICULTURAL EXPERTS ON MARCH 4, WAS 900,000 TONS. THIS ESTIMATE TOOK INTO CONSIDERATION IMPROVED PROSPECTS FOR WHEAT HARVEST FROM FEB RAINS BUT ALSO HAD TO TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION LOWERED ACREAGE THIS YEAR AND SCARCITY OF CANAL WATER. (SHAHANI SAID ACREAGE ESTIMATES FOR NORTHERN SIND DOWN BY SIX PERCENT COMPARED WITH LAST YEAR AND FOR SOUTHERN SIND DOWN BY 17 PERCENT.) SHAHANI CHARACTERIZED RAINS AS HAVING HAD "MAGNIFICENT" EFFECT ON PUNJAB WHILE THEIR EFFECT IN SIND HAD BEEN "BENEFICIAL."

12. OF 900,000 TON TOTAL WHEAT CROP FOR SIND, SHAHANI DEDUCTED ONE-HALF AS TENANT'S SHARE. FROM RESULTING FROM RESULTING 450,000 TONS HE ESTIMATED 150,000 TONS FOR SEED AND LOCAL FOOD REQUIREMENTS. REMAINING 300,000 TONS, IN SHAHANI'S VIEW, REPRESENTS MAXIMUM MONETIZABLE WHEAT AVAILABLE FOR COLLECTION BY GOS. FROM THIS THEORETICAL TOTAL, SHAHANI AGAIN SUBTRACTED TWENTY PERCENT OR 60,000 TONS FOR "RURAL AREAS, IN WHICH UNREST WOULD OTHERWISE OCCUR LEAVING 240,000 TONS AS WHAT HE CONSIDERS TO BE "MAXIMUM AMOUNT OF WHEAT WE CAN POSSIBLY GET THIS YEAR." HE HAS COMMUNICATED

THIS FIGURE TO THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT. SHAHANI EMPHASIZED HIS CLAIM THAT ABOVE ESTIMATES BASED ON REPORTS BEST EXPERTS IN SIND AND HAD BEEN CROSS CHECKED FOR ACCURACY.

13. DURING SIDE TALK WITH SIND DIRECTOR OF AGRICULTURE RIZVI CONCERNING POSSIBLE BENEFICIAL EFFECT FURTHER RAINS DURING MARCH, RIZVI OPINED THAT FURTHER RAINS, EVEN IF WIDESPREAD, WOULD NOT MAKE UP FOR OVERALL WATER SHORTAGE SO FAR THIS YEAR, OWING TO SHORT TIME REMAINING BEFORE HARVEST.

14. GATHER ESTIMATES CONCERNING WHEAT CROP WHICH CONGEN KARACHI HAS BEEN ABLE TO GATHER ARE LESS EXACT THAN THOSE PROVIDED BY SHAHANI. THEY PLACED MORE EMPHASIS ON IMPORTANCE FURTHER RAINS BY MIDDLE OF MARCH. HOWEVER, WITH ONLY ABOUT ONE WEEK REMAINING UNTIL THIS DATE, PROSPECTS FOR ANY SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN ESTIMATES BECAUSE OF FURTHER RAINS APPEAR TO BE DIMMING FAST.

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15. PESHAWAR CONSULATE REPORTS THAT DESPITE REDUCED USE OF FERTILIZER IN NWFP THIS SEASON, OFFICIALS BELIEVE CURRENT WHEAT CROP WILL BE A FAIRLY GOOD ONE. THEY ARE CONFIDENT THAT MODEST GOAL OF 600,000 TONS (ON 1,728,000 ACRES) WILL BE REACHED AND PERHAPS EVEN EXCEEDED. ADEQUATE RAINFALL SINCE EARLY DECEMBER HAS PROVIDED ENOUGH MOISTURE FOR BARANI WHEAT WHICH COMPRISES TWO-THIRDS OF TOTAL CROP. CANAL LEVELS HAVE RISEN SUFFICIENTLY SINCE BEGINNING OF SEASON TO INSURE ENOUGH WATER FOR CROP UNDER IRRIGATION. WHEAT HAS SO FAR NOT BEEN HIT BY PESTS OR DISEASE AND EXPERTS CLAIM THERE IS GREATLY REDUCED LIKELIHOOD OF DISEASE FOR REMAINDER OF SEASON. IF TEMPERATURES DON'T GO TOO HIGH IN MARCH AND EARLY APRIL AND THERE IS ADEQUATE SUNSHINE IN MAY AND JUNE, IT SHOULD BE CLEAR SAILING UNTIL HARVEST TIME.

16. SMALL BALUCHISTAN CROP SHOULD APPROXIMATE LAST YEAR'S YIELD OF 100,000 TONS.
BYROADE

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